

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
SECRET/SENSITIVE/EYES ONLYINFORMATION
February 11, 1971

MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Arnold Nachmanoff

SUBJECT: Brazil--More Torture Reports
May Complicate Medici Visit

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Reports of increased use of violence and torture by Brazilian officials in their campaign against terrorists and subversives have become much more frequent in recent weeks after having subsided last summer. In some cases suspected terrorists apparently have been done away with after having been subjected to extreme torture rather than risk their release as part of the ransom in a kidnapping.

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The telegram at Tab B reports that the new Archbishop of Sao Paulo has publicly denounced the authorities in connection with the torture of priests and nuns. He has been backed up by the Archbishop of Rio de Janeiro. This incident may touch off an open Church-Government confrontation in Brazil and is certain to lead to widespread publicity both here and there.

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Increased adverse publicity on the issue of torture in Brazil, perhaps leading to demonstrations or other forms of protest both before and during the Medici visit, could complicate the visit and prove a serious embarrassment to Medici and the President. Senator Church has not yet announced the hearings he was supposed to hold on Brazil, and members of his staff had indicated that those hearings when held would not focus on the torture issue. However, increased publicity could trigger early scheduling of hearings with emphasis on the torture question.

The Medici visit has not yet been announced, primarily because State has been unable to resolve its concerns about the invitation to President Velasco of Peru which could, in part, balance adverse reaction to the Medici invitation. Brazilian Foreign Minister Gibson Barboza discussed the visit during his recent trip to

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Washington, and Ambassador Rountree reports that he is under increasing pressure for permission to make a public announcement. I understand that Assistant Secretary Meyer intends to call you soon to say that Secretary Rogers has no objection to announcing the Medici invitation providing no dates are mentioned. There will probably be heavy criticism if the invitation is announced in the middle of a flurry of criticism about torture in Brazil, but on the other hand we are committed to the visit and the Brazilians could always force our hand by leaking the news if they felt under sufficient pressure to do so.

President Medici may be aware of the extent violence is being used by Brazilian security forces, and may even have given his tacit permission rather than face a collision with hard line elements in the Armed Forces, but his own instincts seem to be moderate and he played a personal role in de-fusing the torture issue last year. Whatever the facts of his involvement, he has thus far managed to avoid the torture question staining his personal image. However, renewal of publicity about torture, especially if linked to a confrontation with the Church, is likely to draw him in and this time may severely damage his image unless he takes early and vigorous steps to de-fuse the issue again.

Secretary Rogers expressed his concern about the reports of torture to Foreign Minister Gibson when he was in Washington recently (memcon at Tab C), but it is questionable whether Gibson would take this up seriously with Medici. It is possible that Medici's own self-interest and/or moderate elements may lead him to ameliorate the situation, or at least make some statements which disassociate him from the hard-line approach. If he does not, however, it may be necessary to consider a very private, direct message to Medici from the President pointing out the practical problems and potential embarrassment to both Presidents of a resurgence of international press reports of increased torture, particularly of clergy. The purpose of the visit--to cement friendly relations--may very well be jeopardized by the reaction in our press and Congress, and by public demonstrations during the visit. The message would not moralize, but would emphasize our mutual interest in protecting Medici's and the GOB's image. Hopefully, he might be induced to take steps to try to control the hardliners, or, at a minimum, issue statements which would

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attempt to dissassociate himself and official governmental policy from the practice of torture.

This is clearly a very delicate and sensitive matter. However, a direct message to Medici may be the only option we have for affecting a situation which could prove very embarrassing to the President. Very careful consideration would have to be given to the content of the message, the choice of channel, and the timing. I am not suggesting that an approach to Medici be made now. However, it might be most effective before or soon after we agree to make a joint announcement of the visit.

Attachments:

[Redacted]

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Tab B - Telegram from Brasilia #095

Tab C - Memcon

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